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JERUSALEM ALSO ICD  
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Iran

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Key stories in the media:  
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Media reported on U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political  
Affairs William BurnsQ visit to Syria yesterday.

All principal media led with a diplomatic crisis following the assassination in Dubai of senior Hamas operative Mahmoud al-Mabhouh four weeks ago: the British Foreign Office QinvitedQ Israeli Ambassador Ron Prosor for clarifications about the use of forged British passports in the hit. The Irish Government also summoned Israeli Ambassador in Dublin Zion Evron (or Evroni Zion). The media also reported that British PM Gordon Brown has ordered an investigation into the matter. Various media conjectured that a long-term fallout in relations with Britain was unlikely. Yediot and The Jerusalem Post quoted German and Austrian sources as saying that the operation was directed from a Qcommando centerQ in Austria, a country that has also demanded clarifications from Israel, according to various media. Israel Radio reported that the Hamas leadership vowed to avenge the assassination. The media quoted former Israeli intelligence agents, including former Mossad official Rafi Eitan, who later became a GOI minister, as saying that another country may be behind the operation. The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday former senior Mossad official Rami Igra told the daily that the assassination would further the aims of IsraelQs detractors. Media reported that Hamas has released the names of two Fatah operatives who have also been arrested for allegedly cooperating with the Mossad. According to the organization, the two men operated in Dubai under assumed identities after disguising themselves as employees of a real-estate firm owned by a prominent Palestinian figure.

Leading media reported that yesterday five U.S. Congressmen on a visit here, which the left-wing American advocacy group J Street initiated, held a news conference in Tel Aviv to demand an official explanation for an apparent snub by Deputy FM Danny Ayalon. Tension between the Foreign Ministry and J Street was believed to be behind the unprecedented diplomatic rift between Israel and the U.S. Congress. HaQaretz quoted Rep. William Delahunt (D-MA), who heads the delegation, as saying that "it was with real surprise and disappointment that we read a headline in this morning's newspaper saying 'Foreign Ministry boycotts members of Congress.'" HaQaretz quoted J Street Executive Director Jeremy Ben-Ami as saying at the news conference that he was confused by Ayalon's calling the lobby anti-Israel. "Our relations with Israel's embassy in Washington are on the mend...I hope this is no more than his personal opinion," he said. HaQaretz reported that J Street had asked for a meeting between the Congressmen and Ayalon or other senior ministry officials several weeks ago. After numerous days of waiting, they were told ministry officials would meet only the Congressmen, without their J Street escorts, which the former refused, and the Foreign Ministry said there would be no meeting. The Jerusalem Post quoted Ben-Ami as saying yesterday that Israel is capable of freezing construction in East Jerusalem. HaQaretz quoted a senior Jerusalem source as saying that the man who advised Ayalon and President Shimon Peres not to meet the delegation was Baruch Binah, Deputy Director General for North America in the ministry. Binah advised against the meeting because the delegation includes J Street members and a representative of Churches for Middle East Peace, which the Foreign Ministry sees as anti-Israeli. Israel Radio reported that the Foreign Ministry would not comment on the affair. Speaking on the radio station this morning, former Justice Minister and former Deputy FM Yossi Beilin said that FM Avigdor Lieberman, whom he dubbed a Qtrue neighborhood bully,Q and his deputy Ayalon do not make mistakes but that they implement a distinct policy.

HaQaretz and other media quoted PM Benjamin Netanyahu as saying yesterday at a convention of the Conference of Presidents of Major [U.S.] Jewish Organizations that the Qgap in understandingQ between Israel and the world over Iran is narrowing. The PM was quoted as saying that disputed elections in Iran and the uncovering of a secret uranium enrichment plant near the Iranian city of Qom had alerted the world to the growing Iranian threat. Netanyahu said: "Now the international community has an obligation to intervene to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon." Netanyahu further said: "Watered down sanctions, modest sanctions, will not do the job," adding that new measures must aim to curtail Iran's oil exports and energy supply. Defense Minister Ehud Barak hinted yesterday in a speech to newly commissioned army officers that Israel had not ruled out independent action against Iran. Leading media also quoted Netanyahu as saying at the meeting that Israel will not release the assassins of former minister Rehavam Zeevi.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday Austrian FM Michael

Spindelegger told the newspaper that the U.N. Security Council is likely to reach a decision on a fourth round of sanctions against Iran in March. Austria is currently one of the 15 countries on the Security Council.

HaQaretz reported that the Jerusalem Municipality will appropriate a plot of land in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood to build a public parking lot near the tomb of a Second Temple-era high priest, despite arguments that the move is intended to benefit Jewish pilgrims and expand the Jewish presence in East Jerusalem. The plan is the brainchild of city council member Yair Gabbay, who said a parking lot is required for visitors to the tomb of Simon the Just, or Shimon Hatzadik. The municipality is not expected to offer financial compensation to the owner of the plot in question, even though it previously required a Palestinian company seeking to build a hotel in the area to pay for the right to build there. Neighborhood residents and non-governmental organizations maintain parking is not limited in Sheikh Jarrah, and say the lot is intended to benefit Jewish visitors alone. Both the municipality and Gabbay, who said he hopes the parking lot will be built within two months, maintain there is a parking shortage and that the lot will benefit Arabs as well as Jews.

The Jerusalem Post quoted senior Netanyahu adviser as saying yesterday at the Seventh Jerusalem Conference that Israel must begin to wage a negative media campaign against its enemies in order to win the media war. The newspaper also reported that yesterday right-leaning Kadima Knesset members Eli Aflalo and Otniel Schneller blasted Kadima leader Tzipi Livni for statements she made at the conference Q statements they perceived as too left-wing and too anti-religious.

Israel Hayom and Makor Rishon-Hatzofe quoted Rabbi Yuval Cherlow, head of the Petah Tikva Hesder Yeshiva, which combines religious studies and army service, who is considered on the left wing of the national religious public, as saying that he has changed his mind and that he now supports the right of soldiers to refuse orders to expel civilians from their homes. Rabbi Cherlow said that the change in his decision is based on the way the state has mistreated the victims of the Gush Katif expulsion.

Media reported that yesterday settlers from the radical village of Yitzhar assaulted IDF soldiers.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that 85 Israelis who were harmed by Hizbullah attacks during the Second Lebanon War have filed an unprecedented suit against Iranian banks, demanding damage compensation to the tune of \$10 billion, and unspecified penal compensation

HaQaretz reported that the Interior Ministry, the Israel Lands Administration, and the southern district of Israel Police have jointly resolved to triple the demolition rate of illegal construction in the scattered Bedouin communities in the Negev. The decision came at a meeting about a month ago. According to HaQaretz, 2009 saw an increase over the previous year in the demolition of illegal Bedouin homes and efforts to prevent illegal Bedouin construction. Last year, 254 structures were destroyed. In 2008, the figure was 225 illegal structures.

HaQaretz reported that yesterday Haifa Mayor Yona Yahav praised the legacy of coexistence left by the first (Arab) mayor of modern Haifa, Hasan Bey Shukri. Yesterday the city commemorated the 70th anniversary of Shukri's death.

Yediot quoted senior Israeli Foreign Ministry sources as saying that the French and Israeli armies will hold joint maneuvers in both countries. IDF soldiers will be granted immunity while training in France.

Major media reported on victories by Israeli tennis woman Shahar Pe'er at the Dubai Open. Last year, in the wake of Operation Cast Lead, she was denied a visa by Dubai.

Leading media reported that yesterday, despite appeals from religious leaders, Florida executed Jewish murderer Martin Grossman by lethal injection. The Vatican had also asked for leniency in a letter written by Archbishop Fernando Filoni on behalf of Pope

Benedict XVI.

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Mideast:  
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Block Quotes:  
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#### II. QThe Test of the Outcome

Eytan Haber, veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, opined on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/18): QThere are two questions that should be posed in this case: was the goal, al-MabhouhQs assassination, achieved? The answer is Qyes.Q Were the assassins caught by the enemy? The answer is QnoQ.... As for the unpleasantness with governments -- in the case at hand, the U.K., Ireland, and France -- we can rest easy. They said whatever they said yesterday, and will probably say no more. They know why. There are also odd scores being settled between the media figures who say that this was an unprecedented QfiascoQ and the covert pursuers, but this is neither the time nor the place to discuss them. In the meantime, Mr. al-Mabhouh will rest in peace, and we will say goodbye and thank you to the men and women of the shadow world.

#### II. QTroubling Questions from Dubai

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (2/18): Q[Regarding suspicions that the Mossad carried out the Dubai assassination], did the goal and outcome justify the risk of carrying out a hit in a moderate Arab country and of exposing the intelligence community's modus operandi? Or did the operational opportunity to get rid of an individual responsible for past terror attacks and current weapons smuggling encourage those who approve and carry out such actions to waive some of the rules of caution? Second, in a tense period in which Israel is trading threats of war with Iran and its allies in the region, should Israel be goading the enemy instead of maintaining restraint? Third, is it right, because of this hit, to embarrass the authorities in the United Arab Emirates, who share with Israel the fear of the Iranian threat? Fourth, in preparation for the operation, were the risks of exposure and restrictions on similar future actions taken into account? Fifth, is there justification in damaging relations with friendly European countries whose passports were used by Mabhouh's assassins? Sixth, is it proper to place in harm's way the Israelis whose identities were ostensibly stolen and used by the assassins? The fear of identity theft recalls dark regimes, and such an action seems to do disproportionate damage.... All these questions, particularly the claims of identity theft, need to be closely scrutinized. Lessons must be learned for the future, and the findings must be exposed to the light of day.

#### III. QLiquidation Sale

Far left columnist Gideon Levy wrote in Ha'aretz (2/18): QWe can believe that the Mossad actually carried out everything that has been ascribed to it, and we can even agree that Mabhouh deserved to die. It's also possible to understand the desire to take revenge and punish him, as well as the need to combat weapons smuggling into Gaza. We can also continue ignoring, as is our wont, the motive for terrorism: the Israeli occupation. But after the liquidation of Mabhouh with a pillow, we are left in a country that not only dispatches assassins, but in which no questions are asked afterward.

#### IV. QHeavy Clouds on the Diplomatic Front

Columnist Boaz Bismuth, who was IsraelQs Ambassador to Mauritania between 2004 and 2008, wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (2/18): QIn the British Isles ... no one (in the media, members of Parliament, and analysts) has any doubt that the Mossad assassinated senior Hamas figure Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in Dubai. The media and public opinion will not allow the British government, in an election year, to gloss over the story.... In Britain, the media have already pronounced their sentence. The front pages of the newspapers leave no room for doubt. There are murderers, incidentally, who have been acquitted due to lack of evidence. Al-Mabhouh may yet become a victim in Britain because of excess evidence.... QRainy days lie

ahead on the diplomatic front, Q an Israeli diplomatic source admitted yesterday in English. Q Rainy days Q mean difficult times. This certainly does not refer to bountiful rain.

#### 1V. Q The Israelis Are Back

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in Yediot Aharonot (2/18): Q What worries [Israel Qs] enemies more than anything else? The insight that Israel is learning the rules of the region, for the first time in its history. They understand that the days have ended in which Israel behaved like a state with no honor, which is willing to submit to anyone who outsmarts it. They understand that Israel has matured, learned the art of establishing deterrence, and that it is here to stay. That Israel will no longer submit to them in exchange for illusions or words. That it will not be easy for them to dominate it from the outside or activate their supporters inside it, because they have lost the confidence of the public. They are starting to understand that Israel is stronger than they imagined or fantasized, and this insight affects their self-image. This, to their regret, is painful.

#### 12. Iran:

Block Quotes:

#### Q Too Much for the Mossad to Handle

Senior commentator Ari Shavit wrote in Ha'aretz (2/18): Q With all due respect to the Mossad, Iran is too much for it to handle alone. The confrontation with Iran must not be limited to intelligence agencies; it has to include diplomacy and other means as well.... If Israel mobilizes its resources and prepares properly, it will pass the test. But in order to do so, it must take its head out of the sand and stop believing that some magic spell invoked by Meir Dagan or Israel Air Force commander Ido Nehoshtan will do the job. Even if there is some magic, it won't be enough. Iran isn't only over there; it's also right here. The Iranian challenge obligates us to reorganize every facet of our lives.

CUNNINGHAM